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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SANAA 000852

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [IS](#) [YM](#)  
SUBJECT: JEWISH COMMUNITY'S SECURITY PERCEPTIONS  
INCREASINGLY PESSIMISTIC

Classified By: DCM Nabeel Khoury, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On April 30 - May 1 Damon Stevens, from the Office of the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, conducted separate meetings with members of the Jewish communities from Saada and Reyda, who expressed serious concern about the deteriorating security situation in northern Yemen. For the first time ever, the Reyda community suggested they may need U.S. assistance to move to the United States, United Kingdom, or Israel if the security situation in their immediate area declined. Also marking a big change from their previous views, the Saada families, now living in Sanaa, were adamant that they would not return to Saada under any circumstances, certain that they would be targeted by al-Houthi sympathizers for revenge killings. Stevens also met with the Minister of Human Rights, a Colonel from the Ministry of Interior in charge of handling the affairs of the Saada Jewish community, and the Minister of Religious Affairs (see septel). ROYG representatives expressed their seriousness about ensuring the continued safety and well-being of the displaced Saada Jewish community, which will be tested as Yemen looks for a durable solution for this group. END SUMMARY

Reyda Community Fears Escalation of Conflict

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¶2. (C) Stevens and emboffs met with 25 men from the Reyda community on April 30 in Amran city, an hour's drive north of Sanaa. Their spokesman, Mr. Faiz al-Geradi, provided an overview of the Yemeni Jewish community, stating that there are a total of 362 total persons broken down into three communities: 45 families consisting of 300 persons in the Reyda community, four families consisting of 45 persons from the Saada community now living in Sanaa, and one family consisting of two persons (husband and wife) living in Arhab.

¶3. (C) Al-Geradi stated that they felt safe with President Saleh and plan to remain in Yemen as long as they receive protection, but they are concerned that the security situation has the potential to deteriorate further. If it does, he said the Reyda Jews would ask for US assistance to move to the United States, United Kingdom, or Israel (Note: This is a significant change for the Reyda Jewish community, which has historically asserted that they would never leave Yemen. End Note).

¶4. (C) Al-Geradi described the al-Houthi rebels in Saada as a "disease that might be contagious," and feared that they may be receiving growing support in the Saada governorate and beyond. He also described the plight of two families living

in the tribal village of Haifa, near Reyda. Three months ago, the families received threats from fellow villagers they believed to be supporters of either the al-Houthis or an Islamist political party. The families were ordered to leave the village within three days by a crowd of more than one hundred "extremists." Prominent tribal sheykhs attempted to mediate and neutralize the "extremists," but to no avail. One sheikh insisted that the homes of the families should be purchased, even for a small price, insisting that they could not be stolen.

15. (C) In effect, one family sold their home for the price of one million Yemeni riyals (USD 5076), estimating the fair market price to be four million Yemeni riyals (USD 20305), and moved to Reyda. The Reyda community representatives further explained that the rural areas devoid of government authority, such as Haifa village, were "anarchic" and the Jewish community could not rely on any protection there, other than that of a sheikh. Reyda Jews, by contrast, benefit from the presence of a central authority, specifically the police, which reassures them of their safety.

Saada Jews: 'We Will Not Go Back to Saada'

16. (C) On May 1, Stevens and emboffs met with 26 men and women from the Saada Jewish community at Sanaa's Tourist City Apartment Complex. The community leader, Yahya Yousef Moussa, reviewed the events that caused them to leave their homes in the al-Salem district: the receipt of a threatening letter from an al-Houthi supporter that gave them 10 days to leave their homes, their hasty departure at night leaving their possessions behind, and the details of their arrival

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and stay at Saada city, where they lived at a local hotel for 15 days before moving to Sanaa.

17. (C) The group characterized relations with their Muslim neighbors as good until the emergence of the al-Houthi movement. He explained, along with others, that Muslim friends and neighbors attempted to protect them, but regretted that they were too weak against the threat of the al-Houthis. Those same neighbors, however, continue to be loyal to their Jewish brethren by taking care of their livestock and property.

18. (C) Moussa put the al-Houthi threat in a tribal context and identified four major tribes in the al-Salem area: Maqahima, al- Ulay, Dhu Husayn, and the Dhu Qulayb. He opined that the Maqahima and al- Ulay had no al-Houthi supporters, but the Dhu Husayn had some, and the Dhu Qulayb had numerous al-Houthi supporters. Moussa did not know the number of al-Houthi fighters or supporters within the Dhu Qulayb or in the Al Salem district. He identified the Dhu Qulayb sheikh, Naji Bin Saleh Bakhtan, as the local al-Houthi leader in the al-Salem area who had threatened them, allowed people to fire at their homes during the 2004 and 2005 rounds of fighting, set fire to his car in 2005, and was actively recruiting on behalf of the Houthis in the governorate in the current campaign. In response to a question on the alleged presence of Iranians in al-Salem, Moussa responded that he was unaware of any Iranian presence in the area.

19. (C) Moussa, with unanimous support from the group, stated that under no circumstances would they return to Saada and planned to remain in Sanaa indefinitely. "We have lost any hope of going back. We have no hope of security," he said. In response to a question outlining a scenario in which the government defeats the al-Houthis and restores order in the governorate, Moussa insisted they could not return even under those conditions, because he was certain they would be targeted for revenge killings by family members who lost relatives in the war.

Minister of Human Rights Meeting

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¶10. (C) On May 30, the Charge, accompanied by Stevens and poloff, met with the newly appointed Minister of Human Rights, Dr. Huda al-Ban. The Minister welcomed Stevens and explained that the Jewish community in Yemen are Yemenis, above and beyond any religious affiliations. She stated that constitutionally, they are allotted full rights as equal citizens. In regard to Saada, she said that the ROYG would compensate the displaced Jewish community for any property damage during the conflict, commenting that the Jewish community is benefiting from ROYG services "as much as other Yemenis, if not more."

Ministry of Interior Meeting

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¶11. (C) On May 1, Stevens and emboffs met with MOI Colonel Ahmed al-Jarbani at Tourist City to assess the status of the Saada Jewish community residing there. Al-Jarbani expressed the ROYG's humanitarian interest in caring for its Jewish citizenry, commenting that the Jews of Saada were used as pawns by the Houthis to challenge the ROYG's authority and enflame the conflict. He detailed that the ROYG is providing lodging and meals for the families, costing three million Yemeni riyals per month, in addition to providing them with pocket money totaling 300,000 Yemeni riyals per month. The ROYG has also coordinated with a Sanaa primary and secondary school, which the community's children now attend.

Comment

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¶12. (C) COMMENT: Throughout Stevens' visit, ROYG officials showed cooperation and were anxious to hear his feedback on their management of the Jewish communities difficulties in Saada. Poloff received a phone call from al-Jarbani following Stevens' visit to ask whether he was pleased with what he saw, and wanted to make sure that the Office to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism recognized the ROYG's serious efforts at protecting and assisting their Jewish citizens. It must be noted as well, that no officials from the Political Security Office (PSO) were present during meetings with the Yemeni Jews, which is unusual for a meeting between poloffs and Yemenis, particularly outside Sanaa.

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¶13. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: Both Jewish communities' openness in discussing security issues and their generally negative prognosis is a marked departure in tone from our previous meetings. The prolongation of the Saada conflict has had a serious impact on the Saada and Reyda communities views' of their status in Yemen. Their fear that the al-Houthis are gaining support and that the conflict may spread is shared by non-Jewish Yemenis inside and outside the Government. This is the first time, however, that Yemen's remaining Jews have communicated a willingness to consider a range of options, to include emigration and resettlement. The Saada community faces a challenging transition if they choose to resettle in Sanaa, and we do not anticipate that the ROYG would be able to finance their expenses indefinitely. Post assesses the Reyda community will base a decision to emigrate on their perception of the durability of the Saleh government, and on any spillover from the Saada conflict in areas closer to Reyda. END COMMENT

¶14. (C) Stevens did not have the opportunity to clear this cable before departure. Names within should all be strictly protected.  
KRAJESKI